

LITHUANIA REPORTS PROMISING CONTACT WITH SOVIET AIDES

COMPROMISE IS WEIGHED

Halfway Measure Offered by Paris and Bonn Seems to Get Vilnius's Backing

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VILNIUS, Lithuania, April 27 — The political impasse over Lithuania's independence appears to be moving closer to a resolution after the intervention of the French and German leaders and backstage contacts between Moscow and the rebellious republic, officials here said today.

The Lithuanian Government expressed sharp interest today in a letter from Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany and President François Mitterrand of France proposing that the republic temporarily suspend the enforcement of its declaration of independence as a gesture to get substantive negotiations with Moscow under way.

"Perhaps this could be considered as a compromise," said Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene of Lithuania. "How far Lithuania can get toward this should be the object of discussion in the Lithuanian Parliament. I do not think that these two countries have taken a position hostile to the interests of Lithuania."

Consultations in the West

Mrs. Prunskiene said the idea was "close to something that has already been discussed" by Lithuanian leaders.

The Kohl-Mitterrand letter came after intensive consultations in Washington and other Western capitals on how best to ease negotiations between Moscow and Vilnius. As a result of the discussions, President Bush, who was inclined to avoid putting the Kremlin in a corner by invoking sanctions, said earlier this week that he had decided not to penalize Moscow for the time being in the hope that this would lead to talks with the Lithuanians.

Lithuanian officials said that after several days of being ignored in Moscow, they were received by high-ranking aides to President Mikhail S. Gorbachev. One Lithuanian said that the talks seemed to represent a thaw.

President Vytautas Landsbergis, who has staunchly refused to make any concessions until Moscow and Lithuania begin official negotiations, called the letter "a step forward toward reali-

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zation of Lithuanian independence." But he stopped short of saying he would agree to the proposal, and called on Moscow to make a good-will gesture of its own by lifting its nine-day-old embargo on oil, gas and industrial raw materials.

Romas Gudaitis, a member of an official Lithuanian delegation that returned today from Moscow, said the leaders of the republic's Parliament planned to meet this weekend to work out a package of measures that could be construed as a gesture of compromise toward Moscow.

He said the measures under discussion included conceding to Moscow the right to maintain military bases in Lithuania and spelling out in law the republic's economic ties to the Soviet Union, but he declined to discuss other steps that might be considered.

"A search is under way," Mr. Gudaitis said, adding that "we need a clever formulation" to insure that Lithuania goes to the bargaining table as an equal partner with Moscow, and not as a political subject.

Reaching a Middle Ground

The carefully worded letter from Mr. Kohl and Mr. Mitterrand represents a middle ground between Mr. Gorbachev's demand that the republic return to the Soviet fold and seek independence under Soviet law and the Lithuanian insistence that the republic's declaration of sovereignty is irrevocable.

The two leaders proposed that Lithuania "suspend for a certain time the effects of the decisions taken by your Parliament," without disavowing the declaration of independence.

Lithuania's decrees on independence, the two Europeans added, "would not in any way lose their value since they are based upon a universally accepted principle: the principle of peoples' right to self-determination."

Lithuanians said the letter was important because it was highly unlikely that the European leaders would have risked diplomatic embarrassment by offering such a proposal without consulting Moscow.

Credibility on the Line

Moreover, they said, by sending the letter Mr. Kohl and Mr. Mitterrand have invested their own political credibility in the dispute. If Lithuania accepts their advice and Mr. Gorbachev spurns it, or if Mr. Gorbachev fails to bargain in good faith in the ensuing negotiations, then France and Germany would also have some basis to feel betrayed.

At a news conference today, Prime Minister Prunskiene said that after an earlier snub by the State Department



Associated Press

Lithuania expressed interest yesterday in a compromise plan proposed by France and Germany to ease its negotiations with Moscow. Despite

the Kremlin's economic blockade of the Baltic republic, the supply of goods appeared plentiful as shoppers in Vilnius bought teacups.

French-German Plea Appears to Nudge Lithuania Toward Solution

she had been given a visa to enter the United States next week on an unofficial visit to plead with bankers, business leaders and senators for aid during the economic embargo. The United States scuttled an earlier request for a visit out of fear that it would disrupt the climate for Mr. Gorbachev's summit meeting with President Bush in Washington, which is to begin on May 30.

Even before the Kohl-Mitterrand letter arrived on Thursday, Moscow had begun sending diplomatic feelers probing the Lithuanians' openness to a face-saving settlement.

After several days of being studiously ignored in Moscow, Mr. Gudaitis and his fellow Lithuanian officials spent an hour on Thursday with Vice

President Anatoly I. Lukyanov, and chatted with Marshal Sergei F. Akhromeyev, who advises Mr. Gorbachev on military affairs.

Earlier Talks Broken Off

Mr. Gudaitis said the talks produced "nothing new" but they seemed to represent a thaw.

He disclosed that the Lithuanians had earlier begun talks with Aleksandr N. Yakovlev, a Politburo member regarded as Mr. Gorbachev's closest ally, but that these discussions broke off after word of them was leaked to the Lithuanian press.

Another member of Mr. Gorbachev's inner circle, the economist Stanislav S. Shatalin, talked on Thursday with Eduardas Vilkas, a prominent member

of a bloc in the Lithuanian Parliament that favors a more pragmatic approach to Moscow.

"From his words, it was clear that Gorbachev very much wants to solve this," said Mr. Vilkas, who is director of the Lithuanian Institute of Economics. Mr. Vilkas said that Moscow itself was paying a high price for its economic sanctions against Lithuania, including industrial disruptions and international disapproval.

He said that Mr. Shatalin had not proposed any specific resolution of the dispute. Mr. Vilkas said his own idea was that Lithuania should declare a six-month moratorium on independence in exchange for Mr. Gorbachev's promise to recognize the republic's freedom at the end of that period.